

affect the power of the President to modify or amend the executive order to which the provision refers.

Several provisions in the CAA make specified changes in statements of managers of the House-Senate conference committees that accompanied various bills reported from conference that ultimately became laws. As with other committee materials, statements of managers accompanying a conference report do not have the force of law. Accordingly, although changes to

these statements are directed by the terms of the statute, the statements themselves are not legally binding.

GEORGE W. BUSH

The White House,
January 23, 2004.

NOTE: H.R. 2673, approved January 23, was assigned Public Law No. 108–199. An original was not available for verification of the content of this statement.

The President's Radio Address *January 24, 2004*

Good morning. In my State of the Union Address, I spoke of a great priority for our Nation, to confront the rising cost of health care and make sure that more of our citizens can afford the health care they need. Health care costs are rising too fast for many families and businesses. It is time to address this problem directly, with five clear steps that Congress can take this year.

First, we can help control rising health care costs by cutting down on frivolous lawsuits against doctors and hospitals. When health care providers are responsible for injuries, they should be accountable. Yet no one was ever healed by a junk or frivolous lawsuit.

This week, I will travel to Little Rock, Arkansas, to visit Baptist Health Medical Center. For Baptist and other hospitals across the Nation, frivolous lawsuits have dramatically increased the cost of medical liability premiums. These costs are passed on to patients in higher bills. These costs are driving doctors from important work, such as delivering babies. And these costs are driving some doctors out of medicine entirely.

In order to protect the doctor-patient relationship, Congress should pass medical li-

ability reform that removes the threat of frivolous lawsuits and the needless costs they impose on our health care system.

Second, we should help more small businesses afford health insurance for their workers by allowing these firms to band together and negotiate for lower insurance rates. These association health plans give small employers the same bargaining power as big companies, making it easier for them to provide employee health coverage. The House has passed a bill supporting these health plans, and the Senate needs to act.

Third, Congress should give lower income Americans refundable tax credits to help them purchase health insurance. These tax credits would total up to \$1,000 for individuals and \$3,000 for families. For many Americans lacking health insurance, these credits would make the difference between affording insurance and going without.

Fourth, we should help Americans with their health care costs by encouraging the use of health savings accounts. Congress passed these accounts last year in the Medicare bill, allowing people to save money for future medical expenses tax-free.

People who make use of health savings accounts also will buy high-deductible insurance policies to protect them against catastrophic medical costs like hospitalization or major surgery. This year, I am urging Congress to make those premiums 100-percent tax deductible. This new deduction would strengthen health savings accounts and make health insurance more affordable for millions of Americans not covered through their workplace.

And fifth, we can control health care costs and improve care by moving American medicine into the information age. My budget for the coming year proposes doubling to \$100 million the money we spend on projects that use promising health information technology. This would encourage the replacement of handwritten charts and scattered medical files with a unified system of computerized records. By taking this action, we would improve care and help

prevent dangerous medical errors, saving both lives and money.

In all these measures, we are upholding the basic principle that private health care and the sanctity of the doctor-patient relationship make America's health care the best in the world. And with the help of Congress, this year we will strengthen our private system of care by addressing the rising cost of health care and helping more Americans afford health coverage.

Thank you for listening.

NOTE: The address was recorded at 9:20 a.m. on January 23 in the Cabinet Room at the White House for broadcast at 10:06 a.m. on January 24. The transcript was made available by the Office of the Press Secretary on January 23 but was embargoed for release until the broadcast. The Office of the Press Secretary also released a Spanish language transcript of this address.

Remarks in Little Rock, Arkansas January 26, 2004

The President. Thank you. Thanks for coming. Thanks for having me. Thanks for the warm welcome. I appreciate the fact that a Texan is being treated so well here in Arkansas. *[Laughter]* It's nice to be in this part of the world again. Arkansas is full of really good people, decent, caring people, and so is this hospital. I'm honored that you would have allowed me and my rather significant entourage—*[laughter]*—to come to Baptist Health Medical Center.

I'm here to talk about health issues. I'm here to talk about one of the reasons why health care costs are going up. And that's the fact that we've got too many darn lawsuits, too many frivolous and junk lawsuits that are affecting people. I'm here to make sure that we talk in a way that says to the people of Arkansas and America that we need medical liability reform to make

sure that medicine is affordable and available.

But I'm here, first and foremost, to thank the people of this medical center, those here in person and those listening via cable. I want to thank you for what you do. I want to thank you for your heart. I want to thank you for caring about your fellow citizens. I appreciate very much your being on the frontline of healing, healing lives in such a compassionate way. Our health care system is the best in the world, and we need to keep it that way.

I appreciate Russ. Thank you for your introduction. Thanks for being the CEO of Baptist Health System. Thank you for joining us in—we just had what they call a roundtable. The table was square. *[Laughter]* But nevertheless, we had a great discussion, and Russ was there. He